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# The Tanzania's Policy on Aging: A Critical Review on Existing Gaps towards Promoting Education for Older Adults

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Policy is an imperative factor for the success of the effective implementation of care and services for older people in Tanzania or elsewhere in the world. However, for many years, care and services for older adults have been highly disregarded. In Tanzania for instance, a policy for ageing people is a just a recent initiative when compared to policy initiatives established in other sectors. The existence of comprehensive policy for older adults in the country is critical because the lack of policy may lead into adverse effects such as inaction on important issues that affect ageing population in the country. On the other hand, however, a mere existence of policy on ageing and on education for old adults does not necessarily guarantee the success of its implementation. In Tanzania the policy on ageing was formulated in 2003. Since then, however, there have been no systematic empirical study to determine its impact. This paper examines this policy in attempt to understand its robustness.

**Introduction**

Globally, countries are experiencing rapid demographic changes at varying degrees towards ageing [1]. In Tanzania even though currently the majority of the population appear to be relatively young, there seem to be a rapid increase of people aged 60+ [2,3], suggesting a clear need for developing a robust policy on ageing. As suggested in literature, in Tanzania, the general population increase is said to be high due to such dynamics as growth rate, fertility rate, mortality rate and migration, and it is projected that a rapid growth of population aged 60+ will occur in the next few decades [2,4]. In 2003 for instance, the country had estimated population of older adults aged 60 years and above of about 1.4 million (4% of the total population), and estimated increase up to 8.3 million (10 percent of the total population) by the year 2050, whereby a large proportion of older people (about 75 percent) live in rural areas, the majority of them being older women [5]. More recently however, based on the United Nations demographic projections, a study by [6], estimated that the number of Tanzanians over 60 years of age will almost triple between 2020 and 2050, resulting into escalating pressure for the

government to design and implement added efforts on aging policy and plans. Such mounting concerns are also due to projections that by the year 2050, the number of older people for the first time in human history, might increase and surpass the number of children under 14 years of age [5].

Given the above uncommon trend, the lack of policy or inaction on ageing might have many disastrous impacts. Such disastrous effects have been detailed in literature to include shrinking working population, increasing number of retirees, threats on sustainability of fiscal institutions, efficacy of macroeconomic policies, rising inequality, high labor force informality, and other socio-economic challenges [1]. Further consequences might include increased expenditure on health and long-term care, labor-force shortages, dissaving, and potential problems with old-age income security. According to the Asian Development Bank Institute [1], the aging population pose a challenge mainly because most of our current institutional and social arrangements are unsuited for addressing ageing population concerns.

The above discussion on demographic shifts and the challenges resulting from the rapid increase of ageing society in both developed and developing countries raises critical questions regarding how best the aging issues can be addressed? Clearly, there seem to be eminent challenges that call for immediate policy attention. As reported earlier in this paper, the poorest populations and nations are often the hardest hit from multiple compounding barriers in the provision of long-term support and services to the aging populations. Targeted policies and innovative strategies are therefore essential to improve the likelihood that the most vulnerable older adults can successfully age.

### **National and international policies on aging and support services**

In cognizance of the above critical challenges posed by the recent unprecedented increase in the aging population, some of the national and international actors have formulated policies in attempt to arrest the situation. One of the key policy recommendations at international level had been the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Political Declaration (Madrid Plan), adopted in April 2002 by 159 governments recommending priority directions and actions to address them. In particular, the Madrid plan emphasizes the crucial role of governments in promoting, providing and ensuring access to basic social services, bearing in mind specific needs of older persons and drawing attention to the urgent need for action on ageing [7]. With regard to education and training for older adults, the Madrid plan requires all countries to ensure that older adults have adequate access to knowledge, education and training. As noted by the United Nations Population Fund (2012) [8], countries such as Australia, Finland, Japan and Thailand where ageing is relatively more advanced, had comprehensive legislation and policy even before the Madrid Plan recommendations. Despite their existence however, globally, several policies on ageing are highlighted as having critical gaps as highlighted by the UNFPA (2012, p: 66).

- While there is a trend to develop national policies or action plans on ageing, there is still huge space for the translation of these into practice and for making the provisions of these plans binding by introducing respective laws.
- Most countries seem to have made some provisions to give issues of ageing space in governmental institutions; however, these designated bodies on ageing are rarely located in “strong” ministries of finance or planning. It remains to be explored what influence these bodies have and how their effectiveness can be strengthened.
- Even though census data are widely available and disaggregated by age and gender, they are not always easily accessible. National surveys relating to ageing are not very common. Such surveys, in particular if they are designed as longitudinal studies, help to develop a comprehensive and detailed understanding of lives of older persons.

- While ageing and/or older persons have been mainstreamed into many policy areas, above all in health and social policy, some areas are still widely age blind as, for example, policies on emergencies, migration, HIV/AIDS, disabilities and family violence.
- Evidence on the allocation of budgets and implementation of policies and programmes is very limited. Evaluation of the impact of policies and programmes on the quality of life of older persons seems absent, too.

As suggested by the UNFPA above, most of the presented policy gaps emerged from the analysis of the data on three spheres namely, policy and legislation, data and research, and institutional arrangements. Similarly, despite the above general gaps in aging policies, many countries have formulated national policies on aging (UNFPA, 2012). In Tanzania as a result of the international thrust on the need for policy on ageing, and the admittance of the reality that ‘old age and aging has been of great concern’ [5] the country formulated a National Ageing Policy in 2003 with the following specific objectives: -

- To recognize older people as a resource.
- To create a conducive environment for the provision of basic services to older people.
- To allocate resources for older people’s income generation activities and their welfare.
- To empower families for sustained support to older people.
- To initiate and sustain programmes that provide older people with the opportunity to participate in economic development initiatives.
- To prepare strategies and programmes geared towards elimination of negative attitudes and age discrimination.
- To enact laws that promote and protect the welfare of older
- To ensure that older people receive basic health services.
- To initiate programmes that will provide an opportunity for older people to sustain good customs and traditions for the youth in the society [5]

The above objectives of Tanzania’s National Ageing Policy suggest the government intention to address the challenges facing the older adult population in the country. However, this policy is not free from criticisms. For instance, even though the above objectives are said to be specific, some of them do not seem to be explicit and they lack a focus on education for older adults. For example, even though the policy intends to recognize the old people as a resource, it is not clear how and in which ways will the older people be recognized as a resource. Similarly, in the second objective about creation of a conducive environment for the provision of basic

services to older people, it is not clear what are the basic services for older adults and how will the conducive environment be created.

With regard to education for older adults however, even though the policy objectives do not explicitly mention about it, the importance of educating adults had been emphasized ever since the era of the Tanzania's founding president, Julius Nyerere in 1970 when he declared the 1970 an adult education year. In his speech Nyerere articulated that 'first we must educate adults because our children will not have an impact on our economic development for five, ten, or even twenty years. We cannot wait until our children are grown up before we get economic and social development' [9], meaning that for immediate development in emergent nations facing backwardness in development, education for adults should be a priority. However, despite those policies, there seem to be discrepancy between policy and practice and the extent to which those policies are put into practice has not been established empirically. This paper examines the 2003 Tanzania's National Ageing policy in attempt to understand its robustness with regard to promotion of education for older adults and other services. The rest of the paper presents the methodology and the findings.

## Methodology

A policy can be examined from multiple perspectives [10]. In this paper, a qualitative research approach using a critical documentary review was adopted. In particular, the study adopted the policy analysis frameworks proposed by such scholars as Molle [11], WHO recommends analysis based on the contemplation of the wider contexts in which policies exist. A similar framework adopted in this study was proposed by Cheng & Cheung [12] who recommend consideration of four frames, namely, analysis of background and underlying principles, analysis of the policy processes, analysis of the effect of the policy, and analysis of gaps between implementation and planning. Both models seemed to be useful in understanding policies. The Molle's [11] model for instance, seems to be robust since it could aid understanding of the role of the state and other agencies in supporting and regulating different initiatives on ageing. Using this framework also policies could be considered in the context of the various inputs and resource requirements. Meanwhile, the Cheng & Cheung's [12] framework is also appealing because it seemed to provide a more comprehensive perspective for critically reviewing current policies.

## The Findings

From a review of the 2003's National Ageing Policy made; a number of themes could be drawn.

### Policy as instrument for setting the national direction on aging

The first theme was about the utility of the Tanzanian policy on ageing in which, it was noted that, the existence of the National Ageing Policy in the country seemed to be important because it marked a milestone in the overall history of the care and services of the ageing population. As reported in this policy document, its

formulation reflected the people's long-term concerns on the need for care and welfare of the ageing population in the country. To some extent the existence of the 2003 Ageing Policy in the country has been instrumental in setting the direction of aging population welfare and led the way to the possibility for enactment of laws and emphasis on the role government and other actors. Not only that but also the policy has increased coordination and integration of elderly care and welfare. For instance, as a result of the National Policy on Aging, the government has proclaimed free access to medical care in governmental hospitals, health centers, and dispensaries for older people [12]. Furthermore, the government has established a specific Ministry dealing with ageing and/or older persons, suggesting that some progress have been made in mainstreaming ageing and older persons' issues into sectoral policy. As pointed out earlier in this paper, the existence of aging policy in the country is an indication of existence of a system in place towards encouraging favorable environments for equal opportunity and equity on services for ageing population, even though there seem to be still a gap between theory and practice as noted in the rest of the findings in this paper.

### Critical gaps in the policy

Despite the above strengths of the Tanzania's Aging Policy, several critical gaps could be identified:

#### Perpetual economic hardship among the ageing populaces:

As indicated in the background information, one of the justifications for the formulation of the Tanzania's Ageing Policy was the realization of the socio-economic challenges that had been facing them for many years in the past. Among the problems facing the older adults as acknowledged in the 2003 policy for instance, include the following. 'Poverty, inadequate health services and pension and lack of participation in important decisions affecting national development' [5].

'Economically, older people are among the poorest in the society. Various groups of older people such as peasants, herdsmen and fishermen do not belong to any formal social security system. Retired older people who are members of the social security schemes, face problems resulting from inadequate benefits and bureaucratic bottlenecks. Furthermore, the existing poverty reduction strategies do not include older people [5].

The above findings, suggest some of the challenges facing the ageing population in Tanzania, particularly in the social and economic spheres. As indicated above, until recently, older people have been among the most vulnerable in the society in terms their levels of their socio-economic settings [2]. In particular, the situation seems to be even worse among the rural older women, who seem to be amongst the poorest in the country [13] UNFPA, 2012. For example, despite the governmental proclamation of the policy on Aging, recent studies [14] suggest that income security was still one of the issues among older people and the pension schemes for retired older people were only accommodating few older people who have worked in formal sectors [4]. In that

study it is portrayed further that, even for those who succeed in becoming eligible for the pension funds, the amount of the pension is extremely small and the payment often delays. This situation has also been highlighted in several other studies such as Heslop & Gorman [15], which indicates that the older people, and especially older women, are amongst the poorest in the country whose poverty level often goes beyond income, and includes physical weaknesses, isolation, powerlessness and low self-esteem (see also, [2, 16]). As noted further by the [16], in areas where rights exist (over property and health care for example), older people often fail to claim their entitlements because of the lack of information and appropriate structures. It was noted further that in Tanzania, the majority of older people reside in the rural areas in poverty, with some of them who had no formal employment, being forced to continue working even they have diminished physical energy.

### **Family or government responsibility?**

The other theme which emerged from the analysis of the 2003 Ageing Policy document was the vagueness and tension between family and government positions in shouldering the responsibility of service and care for the older adults. Despite the existence of the 2003 National Ageing Policy in the country, the policy seems to lay much of the burden of care and services for older people on their families, with government seen as unwilling to establish long-term institutions for supporting the aging population as the policy extract below indicates. The government does not expect to establish older people's long-term care institutions. In order to provide care for older people, families and the society in general will be mobilized/sensitized to care and support older people.... Older people will be cared for in their respective community [5].

The above extract from the aging policy suggests that much of the responsibility for care and services of older people seem to be placed on individual families and communities, and there is less government involvement. As suggested above, the government is mainly concerned with mobilizing communities. It further suggests that the older people will be cared by their respective communities without specifying the ways the communities should be mobilised. Whereas the government expect that families will take the responsibility of care of the older people, there is evidence in literature, to suggest that several families have relatively low income and may fail to offer appropriate care and support. As suggested by the UNDP [17] for example, poverty remains widespread and the country is characterized by low levels of human development, suggesting that most families are poor. As recommended in literature (see for example, UN, 2020 [18]), the active government intervention in handling ageing is crucial for any policy to work. Not only that but also, elsewhere where countries have established policies and measures to improve elderly services and care, the older people have improved independent living and wellbeing. Some of the measures taken in those countries for example, include improving living arrangements of older persons, expansion of opportunities for assisted living and promoting the age-friendly

communities. Further interventions include, creating schemes for long-term and institutional care of older persons including provision of incentives and support for families to care for older persons at home. These findings therefore suggest the centrality of active involvement of government in creating institutionalized care and support for older adults.

### **Less attention on education for older adults**

In the Tanzania's 2025 Development Vision, the country envisages to become a well-educated society, a nation which produces highly educated people sufficiently equipped with the requisite knowledge to solve the society's problems and meet the challenges of development and attain competitiveness at regional and global levels [19]. Despite these aspirations, the 2003 National Ageing Policy [5] does not seem to place a due emphasis on creating diverse learning opportunities for older adults using distinct pathways. Even though the policy has a section on education, the policy seems to be narrow, considering adult education instead of lifelong learning, suggesting that it does not put much emphasis on learning for older adults. Instead, the policy emphasizes using the older people as educators of the young generations in the society and there is less attention on creating diverse learning pathways for the older adults, as the policy extracts below indicate.

Older people will be sensitized on their rights and responsibilities in the family and community. A mechanism will be put in place to ensure that older people participate in adult education training programmes. A mechanism will be put in place to ensure that older people participating in income generation receive relevant training. Mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that young people are inculcated into good customs and traditions.

(Tanzania's National Ageing Policy [5]) As the above policy extracts suggest, the 2003 aging policy does not seem to adequately lay strategies for offering older adults diverse learning opportunities. Despite the existence of the ageing policy in the country, a documentary review made suggest that the policy seemed to be too generally stated as 'to ensure that older people participate in adult education training programmes'. As suggested above, the policy statement seem to mainly emphasize on adult education in general without specifying other relevant programmes for older adults such as health, elderly care, financial and legal planning for retirement, inheritance management, as well as re-skilling programmes for older adults. Even though the policy talks about provision of adult education, it seems to overlook the provision of specific programmes that might have encouraged the vibrant engagement of older persons. Not only that but also the policy is silent or lacks specificity with regard to teaching and learning of other pertinent programmes such as literacy skills for older adults. A Recent report by UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2019) based on the World Report on Ageing and Health, WHO (2015) noted that older adults not only had lower literacy scores but rather their levels of 'health literacy' was also lower than other sections of the population [20,21].

## Conclusion and the way forward

This paper has examined the Tanzania's 2003 policy on ageing in attempt to understand its robustness. From the above policy analysis and a documentary review made, despite the availability of the 2003 National Ageing Policy, the findings suggest that many issues with regard to ageing and education for older adults in Tanzania remain unresolved and there are still a lot to do towards achieving the Madrid International Plan of Action on ageing 2002. Some of the unresolved issues so far include Perpetual economic hardship among the ageing populaces, and a tension between family and government on who is to shoulder the responsibility of offering services and care for the older adults. One of the possible reasons for constraints towards achieving the policy goals could be the vagueness of the policy itself and the resource constraints facing the country. Other possible constraints could be inadequate policy resolution and poor mechanisms to adequately incorporate the resolutions. Considering the above identified shortcomings in the Tanzania aging policy, it is recommended that there is a need to develop an even strong policy that would allow among other things coordination between stakeholders, informative research and policy briefs by academia and consistent engagement with civil society and government bureaucrats to push through the policy on education for old adults in Tanzania. Even though Tanzania has made some progress in having a policy, there seem to be inadequate emphasis to successfully implement commitments made to adjust towards effective provision of education for older adults. To improve the situation there seem to be a need to conduct a comprehensive situation analysis that would involve older adults, to review the current policies and assess the actions of the various stakeholders towards Madridplan.

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## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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